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Hopes for Early Arms Accord Fade in Washington

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WASHINGTON, Nov. 6—Government officials said today that Soviet-American momentum toward achieving a new strategic arms accord had slowed largely because of political considerations, but also because of recent efforts by Moscow to conceal missile-test information from American intelligence collectors.

Until recently officials had expressed confidence about the ability of the two sides to reach an agreement in the near future. They now acknowledge that several factors have led to a slowdown. The most important, they said, is the Americans' unwillingness to give the impression that they are making concessions in the final phase of the talks.

But the officials added that recent Soviet testing activities had caused concern in intelligence circles, reinforcing reluctance to move ahead. As a result, officials said, it is now unlikely that an accord will be reached this year, despite President Carter's remark last week that this was still his goal.

Soviet Said to Encode Guidance

In response to questions concerning the ability of the United States to monitor an accord, officials disclosed that the Soviet Union, in testing its heavy SS-18 missile, had encoded the electronic signals transmitted from the missile's guidance unit to ground stations to make them unintelligible to American monitors. The signals give data on flight performance and, according to the Americans, are important in monitoring Soviet treaty compliance.

In early October, after Foreign Minister Andrei A. Gromyko had visited the United States, officials expressed confidence that an accord could be completed this year, perhaps at a meeting between Mr. Carter and Leonid I. Brezhnev, the Soviet leader. Yet the lack of progress in talks in Moscow last month between Mr. Gromyko and Secretary of State Cyrus R. Vance has led to pessimism.

A high-ranking official, referring to the lack of progress in the Moscow talks, suggested that it "might have been a mistake" for the United States to have gone ahead with the meeting.

Other officials said the United States was reluctant to schedule a new meeting until Moscow had indicated that it was prepared to budge from its present positions on the issues still in dispute. "We want to see some constructive and imaginative ideas from Moscow before we set up another meeting," one aide said.

In part, this reluctance reflects a desire to increase the chances for ratification by the Senate. Any significant concessions at this stage, officials indicated, could make ratification all but impossible.

At the same time, officials said that the two sides continued to disagree on several points, including the following:

1. The number of warheads that the United States could deploy on a new missile. Under the proposed accord, both sides would be able to deploy one new land-based intercontinental missile before 1983. The United States wants to put as many warheads atop its new missile as the Soviet Union now has aboard its heavy SS-18, namely 10. Moscow says the United States is not permitted any heavy missiles under the accord and thus should be allowed to only six warheads.

2. The number of cruise missiles that the United States could deploy aboard strategic bombers. Both sides have agreed that bombers equipped with cruise missiles would be limited. Moscow also wants to limit the number of cruise missiles that could be deployed on any one bomber. The United States is agreeable to this idea in principle, but is pushing for a formula that would allow it, on the average, to deploy 35 missiles per bomber and give it the right to deploy more on some planes if it puts fewer on others. Moscow finds this unacceptable.

3. The deployment of conventionally armed cruise missiles on planes. Although the United States is willing to limit bombers equipped with nuclear cruise missiles, it wants no limit on conventional cruise missiles. Moscow insists that planes with any long-range cruise missiles must be counted because of the difficulty of distinguishing between nuclear and conventional versions.

4. Restrictions on the Soviet bomber known as the Backfire in the West. Al-

though the United States has agreed not to count the Backfire as a strategic bomber, it wants Moscow to agree to constraints on production, modernization and deployment. Moscow is said to be willing only to freeze the production rate.

Joint Chiefs Firm on Bomber

The Backfire problem is said to provide yet another reason that the United States is exercising caution in the talks. The Joint Chiefs of Staff have been the most vigorous advocates of strict controls on the bomber, but several officials hope that allowing the United States to produce a similar plane would lessen the concerns of the military.

The Chairman of the Joint Chiefs, Gen. David Jones, is said to have been attracted to this idea, but other members are known to be skeptical. As a result, the United States apparently continues to demand more specific restrictions than Moscow is willing to provide.

The Soviet effort to conceal information on the recent SS-18 missile tests was listed by officials as the latest obstacle.

In a provision of the 1972 arms accord, as well as the draft agreement now under discussion, the two sides agreed not to interfere with the ability of either to use spy satellites and electronic listening posts to insure compliance. After the signing of the 1972 agreement, Moscow was reported to have encoded guidance data in several missile tests, leading to charges from members of Congress that Moscow was violating verification provisions.

The United States has refused to comment on these reports, but officials have said that Soviet attempts to encode test data would not violate the 1972 accord because it limited only the number of missiles and not their performance. However, the proposed accord would place limits on missile modernization and, officials said, the ability of the United States to monitor Soviet tests would thus be vital to verification.

The missile testing episode has stirred unusual concern within the Administration since, even prior to the SS-18 firings, officials viewed verification as one of the most controversial issues in any Senate debate over a new arms agreement.